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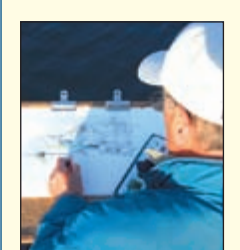


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## HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BIRD?

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## No cost of living increases in county budget

Jane Howard

After several weeks of budget negotiations with various departments, the county board has approved a preliminary budget with a levy of \$6,035,189 for 2010. This represents an increase of \$411, 560, or 7.32%, over the 2009 levy. The Minnesota Department of Revenue will review the request, which includes \$356,575 in special levies.

The proposed budget calls for using up \$286,683 of the fund balance for general revenue (\$117,000), the Highway Department (\$117,000), Public Health & Human Services (\$37,948), and the airport (\$14,735). It includes step increases but no cost of living increases.

Special levies being requested would cover Public Health & Human Services matching fund requirements and federal grant reductions; Public Employees Retirement Association employer contribution increases; Sheriff's Office wages and benefits; and 2008 and 2009 unallotment of aids.

At the Tuesday, September 15, 2009 county board meeting, Commissioner Bruce Martinson recommended taking a grant of \$100,000 for Chik-Wauk Museum out of the 2010 county budget. Martinson said he thought the museum could access the same amount from the state's 3/8% Clean Water, Land, and Legacy tax.

At the same meeting, the board unanimously approved a

\$10,424 contract with Crawford Excavating for the installation of a rain garden to catch runoff from the courthouse parking lot. The cost of plants will add \$4,200 to the cost of the project, but the county will only pay 25% of the total cost, or \$3,656.

On behalf of the county safety committee, Personnel Director Janet Simonen requested \$2,000 for employee fire extinguisher training. The board approved the request unanimously.

At the end of the meeting, Commissioner Jan Hall requested that the board set up a closed meeting to discuss Highway Department issues. Janet Simonen stated that the meeting would need to be closed if they were to talk about specific employees but would need to be open if they were talking about departmental issues in general.

Commissioner Hall said that issues were being brought to her by Highway Department personnel.

Simonen recommended that Hall and Highway Department liaison Fritz Sobanja talk to County Attorney Tim Scannell to determine if the issue in question should be discussed in an open meeting or a closed meeting. Both commissioners agreed to do so.

**A public discussion of the proposed budget will be held with the county board at 6:01 p.m. Tuesday, December 15 in the courthouse commissioners' room.**

Catchin' a musical wave!



Staff photos/Rhonda Silencio  
**Rockin' in the Rec. Park!** WTIP Community Radio hosted the second Radio Waves Musical Festival at the Grand Marais Rec. Park on Saturday, September 12. **Above:** Tiny Aurora Galligher, 1-year-old, was perhaps one of the tiniest—and happiest—attendees of the WTIP Radio Waves Concert. **Below Right:** Kit Robertson and Bill Dahl of Grand Portage enjoy a dance while "Cook County's Most Wanted," *Rod 'n Real*, played under the big tent at the Grand Marais Recreation Park.



Staff photos/Jane Howard  
**Above left:** Critter du Jour was one of the 12 amazing groups that played at the Radio Waves Music Festival. **Left:** WTIP staff and volunteers were the concert "roadies" at the Radio Waves Concert on Saturday, September 12. (L-R) Melanie Steel, Jay Andersen, Tamara Andersen, Jan Smith.

## Arrowhead Trail bridge under scrutiny

Jane Howard

The county board voted Tuesday, September 15, 2009 to pay Erickson Engineering Company of Bloomington up to \$3,300 to inspect the Pine River bridge (between McFarland and Little John lakes) at the end of the Arrowhead Trail in Hovland. According to County Engineer Shae Kosmalski, a certified bridge inspector herself, the bridge is in "below average condition," and she thinks it will probably need to be replaced next year.

Both the National Highway Institute and the Minnesota Department of Transportation require all bridges to be inspected each year except for a few that are in exceptionally good condition.

Last year, county engineering technician and certified bridge inspector Dick Christiansen gave the Pine River bridge a rating of four on a scale of 1-9, with a rating of one meaning a bridge would be closed. He recommended no restrictions at that point, but between then and now,



Kosmalski said, the bridge has gone from "marginal to bad." Kosmalski inspected the bridge recently and gave it a three-ton limit, which is about the weight of an ordinary pickup truck.

The bridge's vertical timber pilings are molding and starting to rot, Kosmalski said. The way

the planks on top are fastened to the stringers underneath have caused them to be "subject to a lot more force than they should have been," she said. She indicated she is afraid a car tire would be damaged by or even pop through one of the short planks between the ones that traverse the entire bridge from

one side to the other.

The average life span of a bridge is 50 years, Kosmalski said, and this one is 50 years old. For now, plywood has been attached to the deck until a decision is made on what to do with the bridge.

If Kosmalski is a certified



Photos courtesy of Cook County Highway Department  
The 50-year-old bridge at the end of the Arrowhead Trail may have reached the end of its lifespan. **Left:** The bridge's vertical timber pilings are starting to rot. **Above:** Car tires could be damaged or possibly drop through the bridge planks.

bridge inspector, why would the county need to spend money for a consulting company to do the same thing? Like the consultants, Kosmalski has passed a two-week bridge certification course, spent five years working under certified bridge

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